

The request for input to this panel was wide open to “allow the public to express their views on the principles and policies that should govern decisions concerning whether particular functions should be performed by private-sector contractors or federal employees.” Though I’m very well read on outsourcing initiatives throughout the government, I’ll limit my comments to the Air Force segment where I have working knowledge. My view of the A-76 process is from a purely working perspective gained from being immersed in the process for the last 3+ years on two Air Force A-76 initiatives. My background includes time as an inherently governmental bluesuiter and a Civil Service A-76 advisor to Air University.

Leadership

In the commercial sector there is seldom any doubt who is driving an outsourcing initiative and why. In the Air Force A-76 process ownership and leadership is hard to pin down--no one actually owns the entire process. Most efforts have various owners depending on the stage in the process and none demonstrate overall leadership. At various junctures, ownership of the process is in the hands of LGC, XPM, MQ, the respective unit commander, or commercial consultant. If the person championing a particular initiative is not clear, the incumbent (both military and civilian) work force has the distinct and palpable sensation their livelihood is coupled to a process which is adrift with no clear vision. The lack of real leadership and accountability is in large part due to the confrontational climate into which the process has evolved. I know firsthand when the issue of non existent leadership in the A-76 process is raised, a loud chorus will counter that just the opposite is true and the process is “managed” as good as could be expected. As with any organization, leadership and management are incorrectly thought of as synonymous traits. In reality we have a bunch of managers implementing a process. “Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving. Leadership is a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people in that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles.”ⁱ The A-76 process is awash with managers and surprisingly void of leaders. Without true high level leadership the A-76 process will continue to sputter and stall. “A guiding coalition made up only of managers—even superb managers who are wonderful people—will cause major change efforts to fail.”ⁱⁱ

Team Selection

The next factor affecting the A-76 process is team selection. Presently, selection criteria is weighted more heavily on availability rather than capability; and by capability I mean the ability to truly assess any service provider’s competence to perform the AF mission. In the realm of teams they are categorized in ascending order as: Pseudo Teams, Working Groups, Real Teams, and finally High Performance Teams. Though the Air Force views its A-76 teams as real or high performance teams, they are most commonly working groups. I am confident that each and every participant is a stellar individual performer; however, team building is more than just totaling the sum of its individual parts. “Working groups have a common leader and members may meet to share information

and make common decisions, but each person is individually accountable for achieving results. Work groups do not do real, hash-it-out work together. Team members, in contrast, have shared goals and shared accountability. They produce something together and no one member can succeed in meeting the team goal unless the others also are successful.”ⁱⁱⁱ Presently, the entire process from initial announcement through final award is a series of fumbled hand-offs between compartmentalized individuals or small working groups, each with a slightly different focus. Every step taken with blinders on contributes to a shift away from the ultimate goal of the A-76 – to outsource commercial activities to service providers (both government and private sector) to attain performance that is more efficient and yes, even more effective.

To achieve the enormous potential dividends the A-76 process offers, the Air Force needs to realize ad hoc working groups will only produce high performance results with sheer luck and not with its present method of team selection. According to Katzenbach and Smith in their book, The Wisdom of Teams, teams are defined as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”^{iv} The AF approach to selecting teams is to first ask for volunteers and if that fails, appoint someone to the various teams with little regard to individual personalities and abilities.

If the Air Force expects to accomplish future A-76 efforts with a significant chance of success on a recurring basis it must build, at a minimum, real teams. Building teams demands a departure from the common military belief that members are thought to be qualified based simply on their rank and position. The team selection for an undertaking of the magnitude and scope of an A-76 initiative demands well-thought out team selection with a clear focus on building a real or high performance team. Teams should, at the minimum:

- 1) Be all inclusive and dedicated to the entire project thus eliminating the various compartments currently thwarting any synergy and common purpose and create an environment to stimulate those qualities; and
- 2) Be populated in direct proportion to the size and weight of each PRD service area; the team composition should mirror the scope and gravity of the procurement effort at hand; and finally,
- 3) Rely on thoughtful team selection and not base selection on: position, luck of the draw, or a “one size fits all” philosophy. The person that flawlessly operates in their current military environment with regulations, mandatory measurements, and a checklist mentality, is, in most cases, *not* the psychological profile of the “outside the box” thinker needed to assess best practices and commercial innovations needed in successful procurements.

To get there from here requires corporate Air Force to establish a cadre of folks that bleed AF blue while clearly appreciating the benefits outsourcing brings to the warfighter. Re-creating such a team for each outsourcing would be time consuming, costly and in most

cases unachievable. However, developing a team of such experts capable of responding to any organization's needs during the process is not unachievable.

Team Training

A memo earlier this year between Jacques Gansler and the former Secretary of the Air Force highlighted the outsourcing process is in dire straits. Even at the lowest levels it is clear the Air Force is not on the "deliberate course"^v necessary for success. The Air Force formed a team to study whether or not the Air Force has lost its competence to conduct such A-76 competitions. The recommendations of the team were summarized as:

1. "People assigned to conduct A-76 studies should get training beforehand.
2. Teams should be formed to make sure the management plans and cost proposals of federal employees in a competition meet requirements.
3. Copies of any appeals should be given to all interested parties.
4. Before an appeals decision is announced, copies of the draft decision should be given to all interested parties."^{vi}

The first recommendation concerning training is a valid one though secondary to team selection. From my perspective, both the teams that develop requirements and comprise the source selection are, quite often, a collection of subjects matter experts who are uncomfortably forced out of their box and expected to somehow re-invent the commercial activity. The training usually provided is not tailored to the A-76 initiative at hand. For training to be effective it must be directly applicable, substantial, and timely as needed throughout the process.

Up front preparation needs to be substantial and cannot be left to the "learn as you go" method or the 5-day crash course. From simple technical reading training, to commercial best practices, and effective evaluation methods, all training must be made available to the SSET as needed. Quite frankly it is highly unrealistic to expect an untrained Subject Matter Expert with 15+ years in a military environment to sufficiently shift their focus enough to effectively evaluate a multi-million dollar contract without adequate training. This lack of substantial training is easily covered by the unwritten rule: *All parties expect to be treated fair and equal. But today's process is considered fair when we treat all participants equally bad.*

A member of the AF A-76 review team said in the report, "There were some concerns that the Air Force wasn't executing A-76 cost comparisons as well as we had done in the past." In essence, we are performing the same procedures for "A-76 cost comparisons as well as we had done in the past."^{vii} The problem here is we have not lost our competence to conduct such competitions because we never had it. Quite simply: the urgency has intensified, bundling services has increased complexity, and the market place is more competitive. The outsourcing efforts in the past were limited in size and scope which was well within the capabilities of our contracting personnel to accomplish. Today's environment requires us to *build* the competency to successfully implement performance based outsourcing. To proceed on the dangerous assumption the competencies already

exist and easily translate from single service contracts of the past into diverse, large scale BOSS efforts of today, dooms all A-76's to Lackland AFB's fate of reversal after reversal. Further, it erodes the public's confidence in a process that was originally intended to benefit that sector by turning over activities that rightly belonged there, and saving tax dollars in the process. Considering this aspect makes it crucial that this process is fixed, fixed right, and without delay.

Final Thoughts

My last concern is the lack of participants with working level experience on this panel. The outsourcing dilemma is not always best seen from the senior level, the broad experience of "leading business practices, technological advancements, and human capital challenges"^{viii} often comes from front line managers and the tip of the spear. To really figure out where this process is going, it needs to be clear where it is now on *all* levels.

The policies and procedures governing the transfer of commercial activities are basically sound though not perfect. It is clearly in implementation, not the framework and processes, where we lose sight of the ultimate goal of achieving the mission in the most efficient and effective means possible. This panel needs to be supported by folks who have current experience working A-76 initiatives.

If you have any questions or issues you would like to discuss, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Matthew Dolan

ⁱ J.P. Kotter, *Leading Change*, (Boston, Harvard Business School Press 1996) pg. 25

ⁱⁱ J.P. Kotter, *Leading Change*, (Boston, Harvard Business School Press 1996) pg. 59

ⁱⁱⁱ R. Askens, D. Ulrich, T. Jick and S. Herr, *The Boundaryless Organization*, (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers 1995) pg. 156

^{iv} Jon Katzenback and Douglas Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, Pg 45 d

^v Outsourcing Put on Hold By Air Force , *The Independent Weekly*, January 2, 2001, Tichakorn Hill
FEDERAL TIMES STAFF WRITER

^{vi} Outsourcing Put on Hold By Air Force , *The Independent Weekly*, January 2, 2001, Tichakorn Hill
FEDERAL TIMES STAFF WRITER

^{vii} Outsourcing Put on Hold By Air Force , *The Independent Weekly*, January 2, 2001, Tichakorn Hill
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^{viii} Slide 4, Commercial Activities Panel Chairman's Overview May 8, 2001
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